REPORT

Southern California Association of Governments
Remote Participation Only
January 5, 2023

To: Transportation Committee (TC)
Transportation Committee (TC)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S APPROVAL

Kome Ajise

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Subject: Transit Ridership Update

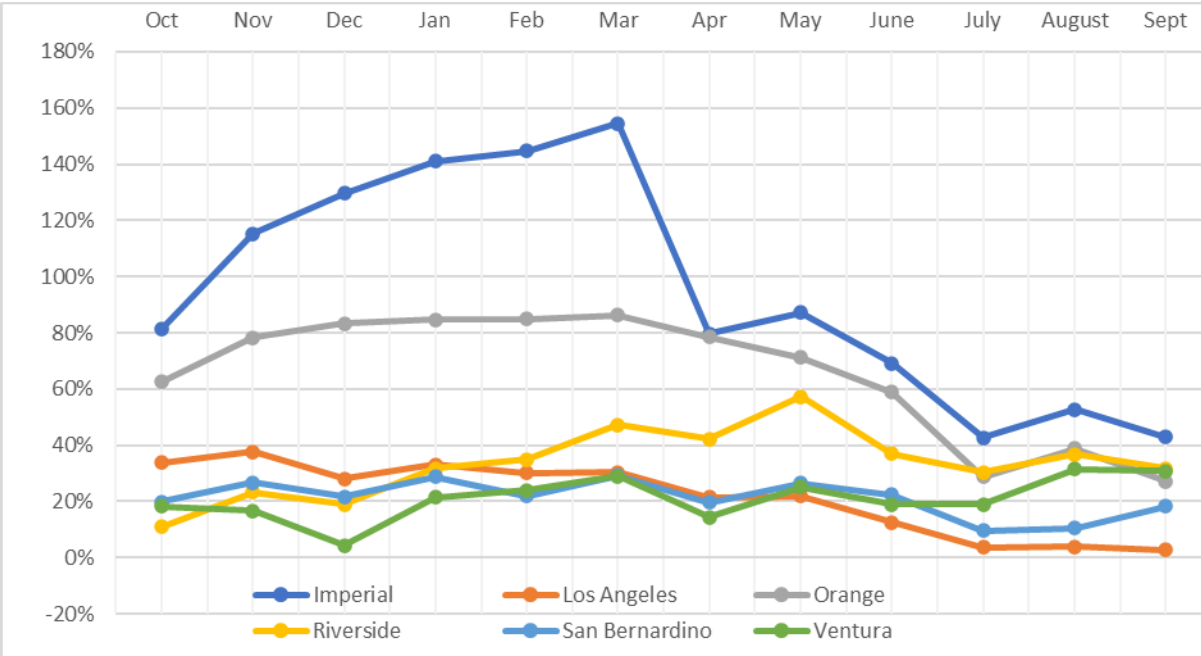
RECOMMENDED ACTION:
Receive and File

STRATEGIC PLAN:
This item supports the following Strategic Plan Goal 3: Be the foremost data information hub for the region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
Since before the pandemic, SCAG staff has monitored transit system performance and reported it to the Regional Transit Technical Advisory Committee and in Connect SoCal. In response to last summer's Transportation Committee member comments, staff committed to presenting quarterly transit ridership data for transit operators across the region. Though transit ridership has improved over the course of the past several years, it is still significantly less than it was prior to the pandemic. Overall, the region's bus ridership levels are currently 27% below what they were pre-pandemic. For Metro, bus and rail ridership have now recovered at a similar level when comparing September 2019 to September 2022 (down by roughly 30%). The issue with rail ridership recovery extends to Metrolink whose ridership is currently 60% lower than it was pre-pandemic at this time. Though some transit operators anticipate that higher gas prices and worsening traffic congestion may motivate more ridership, driver shortages present an immediate challenge and many remain uncertain of what the longer term future normal may look like, particularly if remote working remains a norm for discretionary riders who tend to take rail.

BACKGROUND:
In response to past Transportation Committee member comments regarding transit ridership recovery, SCAG staff has prepared this update depicting the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on transit ridership. Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1 below reflect National Transit Database (NTD) information reported by urban Full Reporters. These graphics demonstrate that bus ridership levels have improved over the course of the past year, though they are nowhere near their pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 1. Monthly Bus Ridership Percentage Change by County (Year-Over-Year)



Source: National Transit Database, https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release as of September 2022.

Most counties in the region have experienced gains in transit ridership over the course of the past year, with Imperial County experiencing the most significant increase (43%, comparing September 2021 to September 2022), while San Bernardino and Los Angeles Counties are reflecting low to modest gains (18% and 3% respectively, comparing September 2021 to September 2022). The Counties of Riverside, Ventura, and Orange fall somewhere in between, with transit ridership gains of 32%, 31%, and 27% respectively, comparing September 2021 to September 2022. Regional bus ridership overall increased 6%, comparing September 2021 to September 2022. Note: the September increases across the board are lower than they were for the preceding months. For example, bus ridership overall increased 17% comparing June 2021 to June 2022 and 27% comparing May 2021 to May 2022.

Table 1. Bus Ridership Change by Operator, Fiscal Year-Over-Year

Bus Operator	Qtr2 Oct-Dec	Qtr3 Jan-Mar	Qtr4 Apr-Jun	Qtr1 Jul-Sep
Anaheim Transportation Network*	159150%	114607%	2659%	55%
Antelope Valley Transit Authority	25%	32%	23%	24%

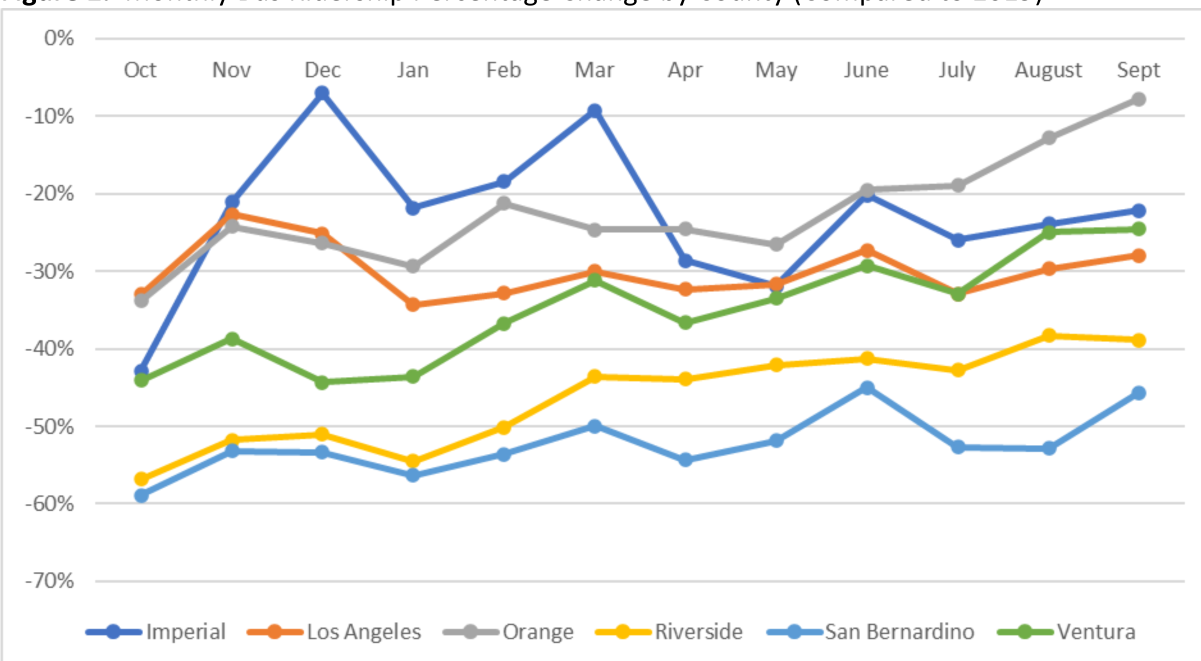
Beach Cities Transit (City of Redondo Beach)	99%	96%	43%	18%
City of Commerce Municipal Buslines	66%	149%	181%	155%
City of Glendale	44%	51%	54%	55%
City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation	35%	44%	48%	18%
City of Pasadena	6%	23%	29%	26%
Culver City Municipal Bus Lines	46%	35%	23%	2%
Foothill Transit	10%	26%	19%	13%
Gold Coast Transit	10%	21%	15%	27%
City of Gardena Transportation Department	36%	28%	22%	-15%
Imperial County Transportation Commission	108%	147%	79%	46%
Long Beach Transit	15%	23%	13%	7%
Los Angeles County Metro	36%	31%	17%	1%
Montebello Bus Lines	36%	46%	13%	0%
Norwalk Transit System	5%	25%	17%	32%
Omnitrans	26%	32%	25%	17%
Orange County Transportation Authority	33%	46%	38%	26%
Riverside Transit Agency	26%	56%	63%	39%
Santa Clarita Transit	40%	56%	35%	43%
Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus	18%	34%	35%	26%
SunLine Transit Agency	5%	15%	19%	23%
Torrance Transit System	13%	-4%	-6%	-27%
Ventura Intercity Service Transit Authority	39%	54%	51%	32%
Victor Valley Transit Authority	2%	-9%	5%	-19%
TOTAL	36%	36%	23%	7%

Source: National Transit Database, https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release as of September 2022. * These extreme percentages may be due to a data reporting error or due to service cuts (see pages 1 and 2 of the following report: https://rideart.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Agenda-Item-17-Annual-Report.pdf).

Overall, these trends are better than where the region was in September 2020 when overall transit ridership was down by 51%. However, bus ridership is still nowhere near what it was pre-pandemic for all counties aside from Orange County as reflected in Figure 2 below. In Orange County, bus ridership is 8% below what it was pre-pandemic for the most recent month of data, September, which is a significant improvement from preceding months (e.g., Orange County bus ridership was

20% below pre-pandemic levels in June). In Imperial, Ventura, and Los Angeles Counties, bus ridership remains 22%, 25%, and 28% below where it was pre-pandemic for the most recent month of data, September. And in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, bus ridership is 39% and 46% below where it was pre-pandemic for the most recent month of data, September. Overall, the region's bus ridership levels are currently 27% below what they were pre-pandemic.

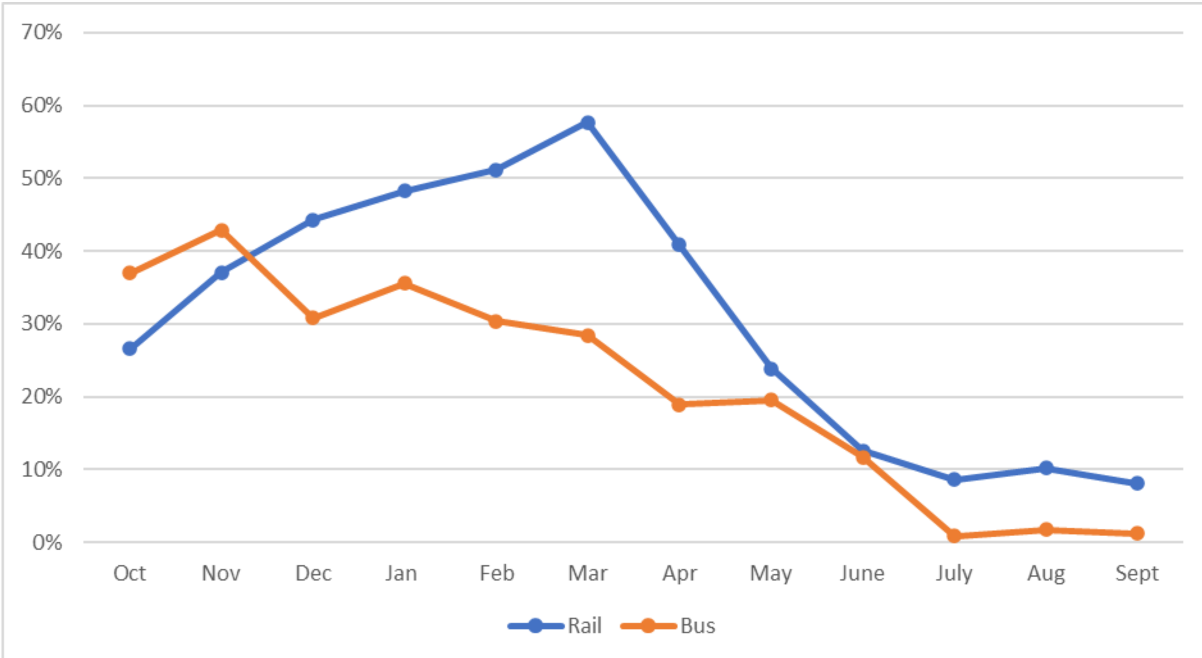
Figure 2. Monthly Bus Ridership Percentage Change by County (Compared to 2019)



Source: National Transit Database, https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release as of September 2022.

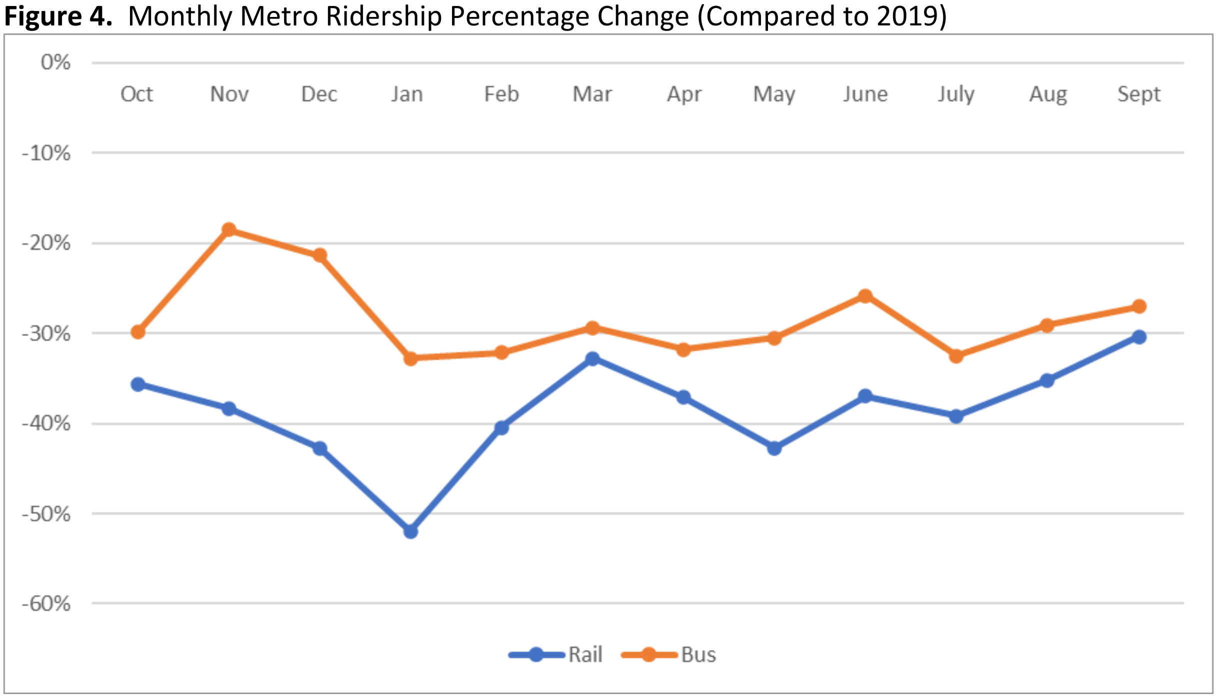
Data reported by Metro for its bus and rail systems through September 2022 are reflected in Figures 3 and 4 below. Metro bus ridership is up by only 1% in September 2022 compared to September 2021. Metro rail ridership is up by 8% for the same time period. Similar to other transit operators, Metro ridership increases were more significant in May when they were 20% (bus) and 24% (rail). While these trends are better than where the region was in September 2020, they are still well below pre-pandemic levels. For example, when comparing September 2019 to September 2022, bus ridership was down 27% and rail ridership was down 30%.

Figure 3. Monthly Metro Ridership Percentage Change (Year-Over-Year)



Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, https://isotp.metro.net/MetroRidership/Index.aspx as of September 2022.

Figure 4. Monthly Metro Ridership Percentage Change (Compared to 2019)



Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, https://isotp.metro.net/MetroRidership/Index.aspx as of September 2022.

Metrolink commuter rail ridership is up by nearly 38% in September 2022 compared to September 2021. Though this represents an improvement, ridership is still 60% lower than it was pre-pandemic at this time (September 2022 compared to September 2019). Metrolink estimates that it has only recovered 40% of its pre-pandemic ridership. Pre-pandemic, 80% of Metrolink trips were commute trips. That figure has declined to just over half (52%) of total ridership. At the same time, the percentage of non-commute trips has more than doubled, from 20% pre-pandemic to currently 48%. Metrolink has noted that higher gas prices and worsening traffic congestion may continue to attract traditional commuters.[1]

American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Ridership Trends Dashboard

APTA and the Transit app developed a dashboard to track demand for transit and estimate real-time changes in ridership. The dashboard compares the differences between pre-pandemic ridership, using ridership figures reported by agencies and estimated ridership during the pandemic. Estimated ridership values for each week are extrapolated values from the most recent quarterly actual ridership figures reported by transit agencies (currently June 2022). Estimated ridership values are modeled based on measures of Transit app usage to provide a current measure of demand for public transit. These estimates do not represent actual reported ridership counts from agencies. The dashboard supports comparisons by size, region, and agency and includes estimates for 17 of the largest transit agencies in the SCAG region. The dashboard is available at https://transitapp.com/apta.

NEXT STEPS:

Staff will continue to provide updates for ridership trends using the NTD's monthly adjusted data release as the data becomes available.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None.

[1] Metrolink 2022 Customer Survey Staff Report: https://d2kbkoa27fdvtw.cloudfront.net/metrolink/97954c01397b5cd4e13a0002dbcc1ef20.pdf